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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 003393

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NSC FOR JZARATE
TREASURY FOR DGLASER, OFAC DIRECTOR RWERNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2015
TAGS: [EFIN](#) [PTER](#) [KTFN](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: CHARITY OVERSIGHT DIRECTOR DESCRIBES HIS WORK;
ASKS FOR MORE USG ASSISTANCE

REF: KUWAIT 1730

Classified By: CDA Matthew Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action request, please see para 6.

¶2. (C) Summary and Comment: Econ Officer met July 27 with Ministry of Social Affairs Charitable Organizations Oversight Department Director Nasser Al-Ammer and Undersecretary Adnan Al-Omar to learn more about the day-to-day operations of the department. Al-Ammer described the various activities of his department, including how it regulates charities, coordinates with other ministries and agencies, follows up on violations, and recruits employees. He said that significant progress has been made on oversight of charities over the past few years, but that more control is still needed. He said that more training is needed for his employees and he and Undersecretary Adnan Al-Omar both asked for USG assistance with training and guidelines. Comment: Econ Officer scheduled the meeting specifically with Al-Ammer because we do not believe that Al-Omar has enough day-to-day understanding of the actual work of this department. When we arrived at Al-Ammer's office, he told us that we needed to go see Al-Omar, which we did. It was clear that Al-Ammer does not feel he can meet with USG and Embassy representatives without the permission of Al-Omar. After sitting briefly with Al-Omar, we went back to Al-Ammer's office and continued our meeting with him, where we learned much more about his work. End Summary and Comment.

Charity Org Oversight Director Works in Shadow of
Undersecretary

¶3. (C) Econ Officer met July 27 with Ministry of Social Affairs Charitable Organizations Oversight Department (COOD) Director Nasser Al-Ammer to learn more about the day-to-day operations of the department. Upon arriving at Al-Ammer's office, Al-Ammer said that we needed to go see Adnan Al-Omar, the Undersecretary (reftel). (Comment: It was clear that Al-Ammer had asked for permission from Al-Omar to meet with us and that Al-Omar wanted to be in on the meeting. After speaking for a short time with Al-Ammer we went up to Al-Omar's office to meet with both of them. When the meeting ended with Al-Omar, Al-Ammer brought us back to his office where we spoke at length about his work. It was clear that he takes his job very seriously but does not yet have the political power to make decisions on his own. End Comment.)

Trip to Bosnia Creates "Good Feelings"

¶4. (C) Al-Omar said that his Ministry and the COOD had "strengthened relations" with the charitable organizations by visiting Bosnia to see some of these organizations in action. He said that he "feels confident in how the money was being spent," and that the organizations doing the work locally were accredited by the Bosnian government. Al-Omar said that the trip was sponsored by a number of different charities, including the Social Reform Society (SRS), and that this specific charity no longer had any "violations of procedures." He said that a "serious effort" was being made by the organization and that the Ministry now has a "cooperative" relationship with the SRS. He said that he still needed more cooperation from "Islamic Revival", likely referring to the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS).

¶5. (C) Reflecting back on his recent discussions with other USG officials (reftel), Al-Omar said that his concerns about the charities are primarily "concerns about the political movements" behind the charities and not the charities themselves. He explained that he considers himself a liberal, and does not like the Islamists behind the charities. He said that he thought a lot of effort had been made by the charities to comply with the COOD regulations over the past two years.

USG Assistance Requested

16. (SBU) Al-Omar wondered "how so much money had been collected in the U.S." that eventually went to nefarious purposes, and specifically asked how the U.S. deals with charity oversight and regulation. He asked for examples of the material and guidelines that are used and welcomed any training that could be provided. Econ Officer said that we would relay this request to the appropriate agencies and let him know what type of assistance and training could be provided.

COOD Department Inner Workings

17. (C) Back with Al-Ammer in his office, we learned more specific details about his department. There are now eight officially licensed charities in Kuwait, including new ones providing help for prisoners, assisting injured workers, and rehabilitating drug addicts. Al-Ammer said that no societies or charities were approved from outside Kuwait, that these were all Kuwaiti organizations. Besides the eight "major charities," as he described them, he said that there are also 23 "welfare organizations" run by rich Kuwaiti families. All of the organizations "have accepted to come under the government umbrella," he explained.

18. (C) Al-Ammer said that his department "was confident in the procedures being implemented by Kuwaiti charities overseas," and that no projects would be undertaken without approval of the COOD. He added that any payments for work to local organizations had to be approved by the banks in which the charities held their accounts. He was "confident that no stage of (any charity) project would be done without approval" by the GOK, and added that "even mosque construction (in foreign countries) had to have approval of the host governments."

19. (C) Al-Ammer did not try to paint a completely rosy picture of the oversight of charities in Kuwait. He said that his department "still needs more control" over the groups, and that more training was needed. He welcomed any offers of training and materials from the USG. He said that he has 24 employees in his department and that he is very particular about the people he hires. He said that the department considers the positions to be "sensitive" and that he personally screens all of the new employees. The COOD also uses a classification system for sensitive documents, according to Al-Ammer.

Coordination With Other Ministries on Violations

10. (C) To coordinate actual oversight and enforcement of rules regarding charities, Al-Ammer explained, there are regular meetings of a "field inspection department committee" where any outstanding issues can be raised. This meeting is attended by his department, as well as the Ministries of Interior, Information and Commerce. Any commercial transaction related to charities, including the display and selling of literature in bookstores, must have approval from the COOD, according to Al-Ammer. He explained that the COOD has the authority to write up violations, then the violations are presented to the relevant ministry for action. A "follow-up committee" within the COOD makes sure that action has been taken against the violations, and he added that he "can go around the ministries" if the appropriate action is not being taken.

11. (C) In the past few years, Al-Ammer said, the "community" in Kuwait has become much more cooperative, and "strangers collecting donations are usually reported." He said that 23 foreigners were seized during the past Ramadan (mid-October - mid-November 2004) for unlawful charity collection, and expected that his department would carry out a similar campaign this Ramadan (early-October - early-November 2005). Of the 23 people from last Ramadan, Al-Ammer said that 2 were from Senegal, 4 or 5 were Pakistani, 3 or 4 were Iranians, 1 was Lebanese and the rest were from other countries or Bidoun (stateless Arabs). After seizing the person, Al-Ammer said, his department would take the passport and visa and task the Ministry of Social Affairs with calling in the visa sponsor to explain why they sponsored this person for a visa. (Note: You cannot have employment in Kuwait without a visa sponsor.) The person is usually deported after the investigation of the visa sponsor. Al-Ammer said that most of the 23 caught last year had either worked directly for or had been affiliated with one of the Kuwaiti charities overseas and were usually recommended by someone to come to Kuwait for work. Al-Ammer said that the COOD has told the charity organizations not to sponsor foreigners for visas anymore.

Getting the Word Out During Ramadan

12. (C) Al-Ammer said that his department will also have

much closer cooperation this coming Ramadan with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs concerning charity donations, which are particularly important for Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. He said that previously, his department only had correspondence with the Ministry and the COOD would ask the Ministry to urge imams (Mosque preachers) to speak out against unlawful and misdirected charity collections. This year, he said, the Ministry will send out a message to all imams telling them that they are responsible for all of the activities that take place inside their mosques, including charitable collections. He said that the COOD would cooperate with the Ministry to remove unlicensed charity committees from inside the mosques.

The Times They Are a Changing

¶13. (C) To illustrate how the perception of charity collection has changed over the past few years, Al-Ammer explained how, prior to the establishment of his department in 2003 and the work it has done over the past few years, "no one dared to remove the man on the street selling Korans and collecting donations." Now, he said, the word has gotten out that this is illegal and the police take the necessary action. He also said that the COOD has succeeded in eliminating newspapers ads and billboards asking for donations and on getting rid of the numerous charity boxes that were in abundance all over Kuwait. He said that store owners used to be afraid to tell the charity committees not to place collection boxes in their stores, but now the store owners know they have the law on their side.

¶14. (C) Concerning actions by individuals on behalf of charities, Al-Ammer said that the COOD maintains a blacklist of persons based on UN designations and will not grant a visa to anyone who is designated by the UN as a supporter of terrorism. He also said that anyone delivering a speech on behalf of a charity must first get permission from the COOD, and that any projects outside of Kuwait would be validated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

No Beard, But Still a Good Muslim

¶15. (C) Al-Ammer finished the meeting by describing the frosty reception that awaited him when he first took charge of the COOD. He said that "the staff was difficult in the beginning, because he didn't have a beard," and that they thought he was going to be the "sword on the neck of the charities." He said that he told them that he has been praying since he was six years old and listens to the Koran in his office (it was playing in the background when we arrived for our meeting.) He managed to show them that he prays just like they do, he said, just without the beard. His goal is to regulate the charities, he explained, not dissolve them.

¶16. (C) Comment: We found Al-Ammer to take his job very seriously and to understand USG concerns regarding the charities and their operations around the world. While he was certainly attempting to tell us what we wanted to hear, we found him to be much more knowledgeable about the day-to-day operations of the COOD than Undersecretary Al-Omar and would recommend that any future engagement on this issue include Al-Ammer.

Bio Data

¶17. (SBU) Al-Ammer is about 45 years old and does not speak English very well. He understands it but prefers to use an interpreter. He considers himself a devout Muslim.

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